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# ANACONDA Reader

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2018  
VOL. 47 No. 24



## Inside...

### SPORTS

#### HOOPS: BOYS LOSE IN OT, GIRLS COME BACK TO BEAT WHITEHALL



Braxton Hill's 24 points put him ahead of Rob and Scott Hurley for third place on the school's all-time scoring list, but it wasn't enough to beat Whitehall on Thursday night. The Lady 'Heads, however, outscored the Lady Trojans by 18 in the second half to earn a home victory.

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#### WRESTLING: 'HEADS FALL TO JEFFERSON



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### BUSINESS

#### RIBBON CUTTING



The Anaconda Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting ceremony for Premier Physical Therapy.

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### HISTORY

#### MEMORIAL DAY

## Slag: An economic savior or another disappointing business venture?

*Dreams pinned on  
byproduct of Anaconda's  
smelting history*

ZACHARIAH BRYAN

It's hard to imagine Anaconda without slag heaps. Driving into town, they're the first thing visitors see. Large obsidian piles of fine, sand-like byproduct leftover from the days of the Copper Kings.

The stuff is everywhere. You can jump into a pit of slag at the Anaconda Smelter State Park, pick up a handful and let it run through your fingers like sand, except it's coarser and sharper. You can buy Ziploc baggies of it at the Chamber of Commerce for two bucks each – cash only though. And at Old Works Golf Course, you can get your golf ball stuck in "slag traps."

Anacondans share an odd fondness for the heaps. Kaitlin Leary, who moved back to town recently, said they're always there to greet her home and would be sad to see them go. Last summer, local couple Zane and Haley Kenny inscribed their names on the slag using white planks, a message to the whole town that they were getting married soon. Gloria O'Rourke, who grew up in Anaconda, remembers watching ants dig up slag from her family's yard when she was kid.

Historian Bode Morin, who has spent most of his career studying copper smelter towns, says when people think about heritage, usually they think about old houses and pleasant scenery. The slag heap offers something else.

"It's an important representation of what made these regions," he says. "These waste piles are as historically significant to the process as the buildings that were there. They are part of this landscape."

The slag pile is at once a hallmark of Anaconda's proud working heritage and a symbol of the Superfund legacy which that history gifted the town. For some in Anaconda, slag is also an economic opportunity, a pathway to



a revitalized city. So far, attempts to monetize it have failed to live up to the dreams – yet the dreamers keep coming.

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On Sept. 29, 1980, a day that would come to be known as "Black Monday," the Washoe copper smelter closed down for good. It was sudden: Just weeks before, Atlantic Richfield Company, the company that bought the smelting operation from Anaconda Copper Company, expressed optimism that it would be expanding operations.

The event caused a major disruption in the town. Over 1,000 people lost their jobs. In Deer Lodge County, of which Anaconda is county seat, the population has dropped 42 percent since 1970, and the number of jobs have dropped by 26.7 percent, according to data collected by Headwaters Economics.



**Top:** The smokestack of the former Washoe Copper Smelter and a large slag pile greet visitors as they drive into town. With approval from the Environmental Protection Agency, companies can mine and process slag, which looks and acts like sand, except with a host of toxic chemicals encased inside.

**Above:** Anaconda residents, Mike and Gloria O'Rourke, have been married for 40 years. Since the copper smelter closed down, Anaconda has had to keep pace with the state on median wages, so many residents have left for other jobs.

In the decades since, Anaconda hasn't found a way to reverse the trend. A 2016 Census survey estimates that there are 200 fewer

people since 2010. The median age now is 46.8, well above the national average of 39.7 and the state average of 37.6. Deer Lodge County jobs pay an average of \$37,000, below the state average of nearly \$44,000. That's a transition to service jobs, found at Albertson's and Hot Springs.

## Trails association seeks grant to resurface Washoe Park Trail





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Photos by James Drysdale

**Top:** The smokestack of the former Washoe Copper Smelter and the 130-acre slag pile greet visitors as they drive into town. With approval from the Environmental Protection Agency, companies can mine and sell the slag, which looks and acts like sand, except with a host of toxic contaminants encased inside.

**Above:** Anaconda residents, Mike and Gloria O'Rourke, have seven jobs between them. Since the copper smelter closed down, Anaconda has struggled to keep pace with the state on median wages, so many residents have to juggle multiple jobs.

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## HISTORY

### MEMORIAL DAY, 1940



The band gets ready to march for Memorial Day in 1940.

Page 11

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people since 2010. The median age now is 46.8, well above the state average of 39.7 and the national average of 37.6. Deer Lodge County jobs pay an average wage of over \$37,000, below the state average of nearly \$44,000. That's due in part to a transition to service jobs like those found at Albertson's and Fairmont Hot Springs.

On top of this all, residents face an environmental catastrophe, too. In 1983, the Environmental Protection Agency designated the Anaconda area as a Superfund site, encompassing 300 square miles of property laden with arsenic and other toxic elements, the result of a century of copper smelting pollution.

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It's in this setting that Anaconda has tried to start its economic engine, welcoming with open arms – and tax incentives – any entrepreneur promising jobs.

**See SLAG on page 5**

# Trails association seeks grant to resurface Washoe Park Trail

KATHIE R. MILLER  
EDITOR

The Anaconda Trails Association is planning to remove the asphalt and resurface the Washoe Park Trail with compacted gravel this summer in an effort to lower the county's maintenance costs, according to Adam Vauthier of the trails' association.

The existing asphalt is cracked and crumbled in several locations due to freezing, thawing and tree roots, he said.

"Maintenance of compacted gravel is about a third of the cost,

plus John Sladich [county parks director] said the trail would be easier to plow during the winter," he said. "And it is better for walkers, runners and bikers," Adam Vauthier of the Trails Association told the commission.

"Some areas of the trails get flooded by Warm Springs Creek," Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Commissioner Kevin Hart said. "The trail should be moved in those areas."

The trail will be realigned in those areas, Vauthier said.

The trail, which runs throughout Washoe Park also will be made

more accessible and meet the American Disabilities Act, according to Lydia Janosko of the Anaconda Trails Association, which is hoping to pay for the project with a state grant from Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

On Tuesday night, county commissioners approved the project and the Anaconda Community Foundation's \$72,000 grant application to Fish, Wildlife & Parks to fund the project. The Anaconda Trails Association will provide \$18,000 as the required 20 percent match.



## SLAG from Page 1

John Fitzpatrick, an "old war dog" of Montana's Legislature, was in Anaconda during that time working on economic development initiatives, and he currently splits his time living in Helena and Deer Lodge County. He says the town is littered with stories of businesses coming to town with big promises and failed expectations.

"Honest to God, every huckster and promoter in the western United States showed up in Anaconda [after the smelter shutdown] with the theme song, 'We can do this we can do that,'" he says. "Every single one of them was a bust."

People are equally susceptible to grand business ventures regarding Anaconda's slag pile. It would be the perfect storybook ending if Anaconda could create an industry around the very thing that represents its economic downfall.

After all, there's a lot of slag: The main pile covers 130 acres, with an estimated 16 million cubic yards weighing about 55 million tons. It also looks and acts like sand, a known commodity.

Anaconda Local Development Corporation Director Jim Davison says developing slag as a resource could help the economy on multiple fronts: It could provide jobs with decent wages, bring export activity to a railroad yard that is mostly used for maintenance and storage and it could bring a tax base to a property where no taxes are being paid.

The EPA is onboard with the idea. The 1998 record of decision for the Anaconda Superfund site concludes that slag will not be considered a waste so long as it's being used as a resource. If five years go by without activity, the agency could force ARCO to start the process of capping the pile with limestone and clean soil, the go-to solution for waste in Anaconda.

EPA Remedial Project Manager Charlie Coleman, who has worked at the Anaconda site since the 1980s, says reusing the slag would have an added bonus beyond "just sticking it in a hole." Not only would reuse provide an economic boost for locals, but it would also leave less waste behind to eventually cover up.

The problem is, slag isn't sand. It's made up of mostly iron and silica (comprising about 72 percent of the slag), as well as harmful metals such as arsenic and lead. While the latter two make up just .35 percent of the slag, there's enough slag that the lead and silica alone

about harmful metals leaching into their otherwise pristine waters.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention took on the problem. The test was simple. Scientists placed slag samples into four flasks filled with water, swirled it, let it sit for an hour and recorded the contents and pH. Then they let the samples sit in the water for a week, swirling daily. The evidence seemed conclusive: the pH changed, if only slightly, and trace amounts of metals could be found in the water.

Furthermore, the CDC concluded that the grounding up of slag on the roads from traffic could produce smaller particles that could be breathed into the lungs, where its sharp, jagged edges can be "very irritating" and "rupture tissue."

Not long after the CDC's remarks, state legislators banned the use of slag on roads. George Ochenski, the environmental lobbyist who lead the campaign against using slag (now a columnist for the Missoulian), wrote in an email that "spreading industrial wastes into formerly clean environments is the height of idiocy."

After more testing, the EPA declared slag inert in most situations, meaning the toxic elements won't leach out a significant amount, and allowed continued use of it as a product under Superfund status, so long as uses meet government regulations. Still, Coleman says that the EPA won't approve uses for slag near water and will typically shy away from uses that would place people in regular contact with the material.

"We didn't want to take that risk," he says.

Ochenski isn't convinced that's enough. He argues that by calling it inert and allowing its use as a resource, EPA absolved itself – and ARCO – of having to clean up a big mess. "It's left in place as a great toxic welcome mat to Anaconda," Ochenski wrote.

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Even so, companies have long tried to find uses for the slag in Anaconda, either to extract metal from it or to use it as a product. Several prospects never materialized, including ones from well-moneyed sources such as the Anaconda Copper Company and prominent New York real estate developer William Zeckendorf. It wasn't until 1982, when Dominic DiFrancisco and his family built a facility to process and sell slag, that some success was found. The company, called RDM Enterprises, turned slag into a multi-million-dollar business that



Photo by James Drysdale

*Jim Davison, director of Anaconda Local Development Corporation, holds up a brick made of slag. It's heavier than a normal brick, he says, and is just one example of the many ways slag can be used.*

the implications of using slag.

"Clearly, if somebody is going to be marketing that material, we have to be very careful about how we divide the liability," Sandy Stash, ARCO's vice president for environmental affairs at the time, told the *Montana Standard*.

For nearly a decade after the DiFranciscos pulled out, companies would check on the prospect of using slag, but would eventually move on. (Davison likes to tell the story of how he shipped a barrel of slag to interested parties in Sweden.) It wasn't until 2011 that a more serious offer arrived from U.S. Minerals, a slag products company based out of Illinois handpicked by a consulting company working with ARCO.

On the outside, U.S. Minerals seemed like a perfect match for the site. The company has plenty of experience working with slag and has seven locations similar to Anaconda, selling the product for uses in the abrasives and roofing tile industries.

The results have been lackluster. While CEO David Johnston wouldn't share financial details, or even how much slag the company has shipped off, he offered that business has been "less than we would like it to be." Right now, the company only employs five workers.

Simply put, he says, the company is a long way from its customers. The majority of product goes to customers out of state, as far away as Missouri or out to the West Coast – a market they would like to grow.

U.S. Minerals has also struggled with the side effects of all slag's lesser, nastier components. In March of 2015, Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined the company \$107,000 for 16 "serious violations," including exposing workers

through the slag pile.

"I would say my children, my grandchildren, my great grandchildren, are still going to be able to see that pile," he says. "Hopefully not as high as it is today, but there are many years' worth of material."

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U.S. Minerals' struggles and DiFrancisco's failure haven't stopped people hoping to get rich from seeing money in the slag hills of Anaconda. The most ambitious project yet – and perhaps the project with the most questions – is currently making its way through the permitting process. Premier Industries proposes to extract pig iron from the slag and turn the rest into a proppant, a material that is blasted into the ground during the fracking process to keep fractures open. Between the two processes, says business partner and metallurgist Dan Tabish, there will be no leftovers. Premier has the only facility that he can think of which produces no waste.

Rick Tabish, the primary contractor for the project (and cousin of Dan Tabish), claims that the project will bring in 700 jobs, gross \$1 billion in sales and pay out \$200 to 225 million in taxes. All of this, Tabish says, and the process is environmentally friendly. The idea has already been approved by the EPA and it is scheduled to fire up operations in the first quarter

of 2018.

But Fitzpatrick, a self-described industrialist, is the project's foremost critic. He supports the reuse of slag and the jobs it could bring, but he's wary that the project is too good to be true. He questions Rick Tabish's claims regarding job creation and taxes, why the company hasn't gotten its air quality permit yet and how the process can produce no waste whatsoever.

"This is the only industrial process in the history of Anaconda that has no waste stream," he says. "That's a little hard to fathom."

He also wonders if Premier will find a market for its proppant at its price point. Rick Tabish told residents in November that the company could sell the proppant for \$300 per ton, much more expensive than typical proppants. He says the company will have to prove its quality to customers.

For his part, Dan Tabish says the product will be high quality and should fetch higher prices. Through the pilot project, Premier has been able to produce "extremely excellent roundness and sphericity," important elements for proppants.

Despite Fitzpatrick's concerns, commissioning the project through the form of permits, here's economic boom for many Anaconda former and support the project, but at their breath.

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Editor's note: Leader is part of Solutions Journal project in Montana.

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# Know Your Property Rights!

## Community Meeting About Smelter Contamination in Anaconda and



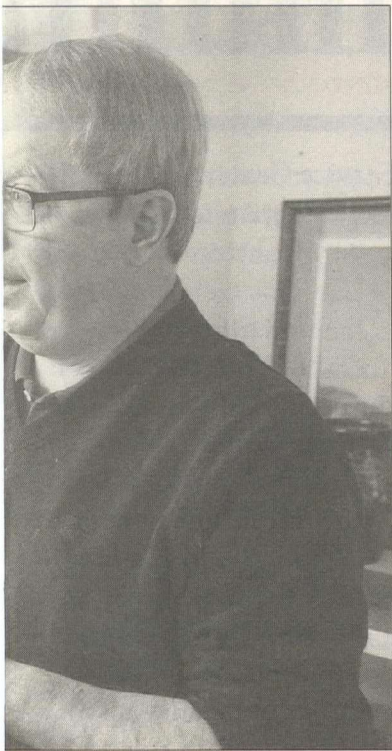


Photo by James Drysdale

*Local Development Corporation, heavier than a normal brick, he says many ways slag can be used.*

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For his part, Dan Tabish says the product will be high quality and should fetch higher prices. Through the pilot project, Premier has been able to produce "extremely excellent roundness and sphericity," important elements for proppants.

Despite Fitzpatrick's concerns, county commissioners have given the project their blessing, in the form of preliminary permits, heralding it as an economic boon. Meanwhile, many Anacondans, both former and current, say they support the idea behind the project, but aren't holding their breath.

Patrick Duganz, 33, grew up in Anaconda but now lives in Bozeman. He thinks it would be great if companies can find success at the slag pile and provide people with good wages. But he's seen companies come in promising big things before.

"I'll believe it when it comes to pass," Duganz says.

*Editor's note: Anaconda Leader is participating in the Solutions Journalism Network's project in Montana.*

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The problem is, slag isn't sand. It's made up of mostly iron and silica (comprising about 72 percent of the slag), as well as harmful metals such as arsenic and lead. While the latter two make up just .35 percent of the slag, there's enough slag that the lead and silica alone total nearly 200,000 tons – enough to fill almost 2,000 ore trucks stretching about 20 miles from Anaconda to the outskirts of Butte, Fitzpatrick told the local Rotary Club in a presentation in January.

Concerns over slag's health hazards first arose in the 1980s, when the Department of Transportation started using it to sand icy roads. Parents were afraid of their children eating snow and ingesting slag along with it. Residents living by Georgetown Lake worried

government regulations. Still, Coleman says that the EPA won't approve uses for slag near water and will typically shy away from uses that would place people in regular contact with the material.

"We didn't want to take that risk," he says.

Ochenski isn't convinced that's enough. He argues that by calling it inert and allowing its use as a resource, EPA absolved itself – and ARCO – of having to clean up a big mess. "It's left in place as a great toxic welcome mat to Anaconda," Ochenski wrote.

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Even so, companies have long tried to find uses for the slag in Anaconda, either to extract metal from it or to use it as a product. Several prospects never materialized, including ones from well-moneyed sources such as the Anaconda Copper Company and prominent New York real estate developer William Zeckendorf. It wasn't until 1982, when Dominic DiFrancisco and his family built a facility to process and sell slag, that some success was found. The company, called RDM Enterprises, turned slag into a multi-million-dollar business that lasted for 30 years and got the "Governor's Award for Excellence in Exporting." At its height it employed up to 20 people.

But the business went off the rails in the early 2000s after its contract with ARCO expired. ARCO didn't renew it, and the DiFranciscos responded with a lawsuit they wouldn't win. Part of the problem was EPA's 1998 record of decision: with guidelines for Anaconda's Superfund status finalized, ARCO was concerned about

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On the outside, U.S. Minerals seemed like a perfect match for the site. The company has plenty of experience working with slag and has seven locations similar to Anaconda, selling the product for uses in the abrasives and roofing tile industries.

The results have been lackluster. While CEO David Johnston wouldn't share financial details, or even how much slag the company has shipped off, he offered that business has been "less than we would like it to be." Right now, the company only employs five workers.

Simply put, he says, the company is a long way from its customers. The majority of product goes to customers out of state, as far away as Missouri or out to the West Coast – a market they would like to grow.

U.S. Minerals has also struggled with the side effects of all slag's lesser, nastier components. In March of 2015, Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined the company \$107,000 for 16 "serious violations," including exposing workers to five times the permissible amount of arsenic and not having required respiratory gear. Johnston says that U.S. Minerals has not put workers in harm's way and that the company is still working with OSHA to see if the fine can be reduced or waived. If an agreement can't be reached, he says the company is willing to sue OSHA.

Johnston still believes there's potential for U.S. Minerals to expand, but he's frank in saying that it would take a long time to work

the rest into a proppant, a material that is blasted into the ground during the fracking process to keep fractures open. Between the two processes, says business partner and metallurgist Dan Tabish, there will be no leftovers. Premier has the only facility that he can think of which produces no waste.

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## Know Your Property Rights!

### Community Meeting About Smelter Contamination in Anaconda and ARCO's Responsibilities

**Tuesday, January 23 • 6-8 pm**

**Metcalf Senior Citizen Center**

115 East Pennsylvania Ave, Anaconda

Attorneys from Beck, Amsden & Stalpes, PLLP – who are representing property-owners in Opportunity against ARCO – will be hosting a community information meeting regarding arsenic and lead property contamination in Anaconda as a result of the Smelter operations. If you received papers from ARCO about your property, including results from soil sampling, please bring them.

**If you cannot attend but would like to receive information  
regarding your rights, please call**

**406-586-8700**